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In re Patent No. 6,945,911 :
Issue Date: September 20, 2005 :
Application No. 09/903,791 : **DECISION ON PETITION**
Filed: July 12, 2001 : **UNDER 37 CFR 1.378(b)**
Patentee(s): Edward Jackowski :

This is a decision on the petition under 37 CFR 1.378(b), filed October 29, 2009, to accept an unavoidably delayed payment of a maintenance fee for the above-identified patent.

The petition is **DISMISSED**.

If reconsideration of this decision is desired, a petition for reconsideration under 37 CFR 1.378(e) must be filed within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. No extension of this 2-month time limit can be granted under 37 CFR 1.136(a) or (b). **Any such petition for reconsideration must be accompanied by the petition fee of \$400 as set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(f).** The petition for reconsideration should include an exhaustive attempt to provide the lacking item(s) noted below, since, after a decision on the petition for reconsideration, no further reconsideration or review of the matter will be undertaken by the Director.

The patent issued September 20, 2005. The first maintenance fee could have been paid from September 22, 2009, through March 22, 2009, or with a surcharge during the period from March 23, 2009 through September 20, 2009. Accordingly, the patent expired after midnight September 20, 2009, for failure to timely submit the first maintenance fee.

A petition to accept the delayed payment of a maintenance fee under 35 U.S.C. § 41(c) and 37 CFR 1.378(b) must be accompanied by (1) an adequate showing that the delay was unavoidable, since reasonable care was taken to ensure that the maintenance fee would be paid timely and that the petition was filed promptly after the patentee was notified of, or otherwise became aware of, the expiration of the patent, (2) payment of the appropriate maintenance fee, unless previously submitted, and (3) payment of the surcharge set forth in 37 CFR 1.20(i)(1).

This petition lacks item (1) above.

The Director may accept late payment of the maintenance fee if the delay is shown to the satisfaction of the Director to have been "unavoidable". 35 U.S.C. § 41(c)(1).

Petitioner states that the delay in payment of the maintenance fees was unavoidable because of the physical infirmities of his bookkeeper at the time.

The showing of record is inadequate to establish unavoidable delay within the meaning of 37 CFR 1.378(b)(3).

Acceptance of late payment of a maintenance fee is considered under the same standard as that for reviving an abandoned application under 35 U.S.C. § 133 because 35 U.S.C. § 41(c)(1) uses the identical language, i.e. "unavoidable delay". Ray v. Lehman, 55 F.3d 606, 608-09, 34 USPQ2d 1786, 1787 (Fed. Cir. 1995)(quoting In re Patent No. 4,409,763, 7 USPQ2d 1798, 1800 (Comm'r Pat. 1988)). Decisions on reviving abandoned applications have adopted the "reasonably prudent person" standard in determining if the delay in responding to an Office action was unavoidable. Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (Comm'r Pat. 1887)(the term "unavoidable" "is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business"); In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-515 (D.C. Cir. 1912); and Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141. In addition, decisions on revival are made on a "case-by-case basis, taking all the facts and circumstances into account." Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 USPQ 977, 982 (D.C. Cir. 1982). Finally, a petition to revive an application as unavoidably abandoned cannot be granted where a petitioner has failed to meet his or her burden of establishing the cause of the unavoidable delay. Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 316-17, 5 USPQ2d 1130, 1131-32 (N.D. Ind. 1987).

In essence, petitioner must show that patentee was aware of the need to pay the maintenance fee, and to that end was tracking it, or had engaged someone to track it before the expiration, but when the fee came due, was "unavoidably" prevented from making the maintenance fee payment until the petition was filed.

In determining whether a delay in paying a maintenance fee was unavoidable, one looks to whether the party responsible for payment of the maintenance fee exercised the due care of a reasonably prudent person. Ray, 55 F3d at 608-609, 34 USPQ2D at 1787. It is incumbent upon the patent owner to implement steps to schedule and pay the fee, or obligate another to do so. See California Medical Products v. Technol. Med. Prod., 921 F.Supp 1219, 1259 (D. Del. 1995). That is, 37 CFR 1.378(b)(3) requires a showing of the steps in place to pay the maintenance fee.

Petitioner indicates that his bookkeeper paid all of his corporate and personal bills; however, due to bookkeeper's untimely illness, petitioner was unable to timely pay his maintenance fee.

As the patentee at the time of expiration, it was incumbent on petitioner to have this patent docketed for payment of the maintenance fee in a reliable system as would be employed by a prudent and careful person with respect to his most important business, or to have engaged another for that purpose. See California Medical Products v. Technol Med. Prod., 921 F.Supp. 1219, 1259 (D.Del. 1995). Even where, as here, another has been relied upon to pay the maintenance fees, such asserted reliance *per se* does not provide a petitioner with a showing of unavoidable delay within the meaning of 37 CFR § 1.378(b) and 35 USC § 41(c). Rather, such reliance merely shifts the focus of the inquiry from the petitioner to whether the obligated party acted reasonably and prudently. Nevertheless, a petitioner is bound by any errors that may have been committed by the obligated party.

As 35 USC § 41(b) requires the payment of fees at specified intervals to maintain a patent in force, rather than some response to a specific action by the Office under 35 USC § 133, a reasonably prudent person in the exercise of due care and diligence would have taken steps to ensure the timely payment of such maintenance fees. Ray, 55 F.3d at 609, 34 USPQ2d at 1788. Since petitioner does not provide a showing that he or his bookkeeper had in fact been tracking the maintenance fee due dates with a reliable tracking system, such as would be used by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business, petitioner cannot reasonably show that the delay was unavoidable delay. In re Katrapat, 6 USPQ2d 1863, 1867-1868 (Comm'r Pat. 1988); California, supra. Put otherwise, the issues of health problems are immaterial in the absence of a showing that this, and not the lack of any steps in place to pay the fee, caused or contributed to the delay.

Since petitioner has not shown to the satisfaction of the Director that the delay in paying the maintenance fee was unavoidable, the petition cannot be granted at this time.

Petitioner should note that if this petition is not renewed or if renewed and not granted, then the maintenance fee and post expiration surcharge are refundable. See 37 CFR 1.378(e) and such may be obtained by written request from the Office of Finance, Refund Section, at the USPTO address above.

Petitioner should also note that since the maintenance fee was proffered within 24 months of the date of expiration date of the patent, he has an alternate remedy under the unintentional provisions of 37 CFR 1.378(c) which does not require a showing of the delay in timely paying the maintenance fee in order to reinstate the patent. The \$700 already submitted would be applied to the \$1,640 fee owed under 37 CFR 1.378(c), leaving a balance due of \$940.

Lastly, it is noted that the petition is signed by the inventor, Edward Jackowski; however, petitioner has appointed a representative to conduct all business before the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (Office). The Office does not engage in dual correspondence with petitioner and petitioner's representative. If petitioner no longer wishes to be represented by the representative of record, then a revocation of the power of attorney or patent agent should be submitted. Petitioner is advised that the mere filing of a power of attorney

and/or a change of correspondence address will not affect the fee address. Therefore, if petitioner desires to receive future correspondence regarding any Maintenance Fee Reminder which may be mailed regarding maintenance fees for the above-identified patent, a "Fee Address" Indication Form (see PTO/SB/47) and Request for Customer Number (see PTO/SB/125) must also be submitted. A courtesy copy of this decision is being mailed to the petitioner herein; however, all future correspondence regarding this patent will be directed solely to the above-noted correspondence address of record.

Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be delivered through one of the following mediums:

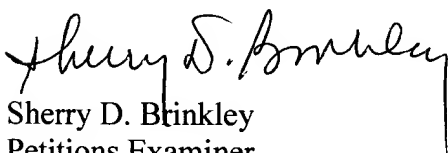
By mail: Mail Stop PETITIONS
 Commissioner for Patents
 Post Office Box 1450
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By hand: Customer Service Window
 Mail Stop Petitions
 Randolph Building
 401 Dulany Street
 Alexandria, VA 22314

By fax: (571) 273-8300
 ATTN: Office of Petitions

By Internet: EFS-Web¹

Any questions concerning this matter may be directed to the undersigned at (571) 272-3204.



Sherry D. Brinkley
Petitions Examiner
Office of Petitions

cc: EDWARD JACKOWSKI, Ph.D.
 28 CENTER AVENUE, UNIT 2
 NORWALK, CT 06851

¹ www.uspto.gov/ebc/efs_help.html (for help using EFS-Web call the Patent Electronic Business Center at (866) 217-9197)